



North American Architecture for the Contemporary Asian family

As a transplant myself personally, relocated from Southeast Asia, I know what it feels like to move to a new environment that is far from where you previously consider as home.

Depending on where you move to, it could be a suburb off Connecticut, Chicago or California, there are several factors/ features that one can add to a house to make it more comfortable to suit an Asian lifestyle.

With the help of some of my Asian friends, here are a few “rules” that come to mind for Asian living:

1. Outdoor shoes remain outdoors.

This is a very common custom for Asians before one enters the home no matter which part of Asia. As a general rule, we try to keep the indoors as clean as possible. One way of doing this is to **minimize tracking of dirt** into the house by taking our shoes and boots off at the entry.

A mudroom is nice before you enter the house proper with built-in cabinets where one can comfortably take off and put on one's shoes.

Provide **built-in** cabinets/ shelving for shoe/ boot/ coat storage. **Cubbies** are also nice to park one's bags, sports equipment, etc.

Provide a **bench for ease of putting shoes on/off** and also for parking your purse or bag while you get you get dressed. Provide a bench preferably with open bottom for ease of cleaning and also doubles up space for wet, dirty shoes/ boots.

Very often, we also have a separate set of indoor slippers. Therefore, an area near the entry where one can store **indoor slippers** is also desirable.

While selecting **floor finish**, it is important to select something that is **durable**, that allows for **easy and frequent cleaning** and is **non-slip**. A tiled floor is ideal for cleaning and is also durable and subject to moderately heavy traffic. Construction-wise, ideally provide a waterproofing membrane prior to installing your final floor finish.



2. We like built-ins.

Because of the tendency for families to be chaotic and cumulatively messy we (especially Asian moms) value ways that can help us minimize clutter in our daily lives and allow us to be better organized.

- Cubbies in the mudroom dedicated to each member of the family for shoes/ boots, coats/ scarf
- Built-in pantry close to kitchen for storing kitchenware, dried food stuff
- Open shelving and open countertop surface for study area for the kids...and kid's stuff....

Built-ins also make it easier for cleaning and vacuuming.

3. We like surfaces that are contemporary, clean lines and surfaces.

Again, this stems from the compulsive cleanliness instinct in most Asian mothers. Clean designs allow for easier and faster cleaning and dusting.

For floor finishes, depending on the room, for example:

- Porcelain/ ceramic tiles are great for areas with high traffic and moderately heavy duty usage, where one needs to clean regularly and frequently. Etc. entry area, kitchens, bathroom. Choose non-slip surfaces instead of smooth, polished ones. Nowadays, tiles are relatively affordable and the range of selection is so wide to suit virtually every palate/ individual style.
- Polished concrete is also another great surface, especially if you have built-in radiant floor system: this surface is great for basements, or living rooms with a slab-floor. One can add color, pattern or texture to the concrete surface. Rugs can be placed for added physical and visual warmth....

For counters and surfaces, think durable, smooth, non-porous surfaces with minimal joints such as granite or even laminate for the cost-conscious. For the environmentally conscious, there are products made of recycled products such as Paperstone.

4. We like open areas for living and entertaining.

Living, cooking, eating, entertaining, relaxing, such is the connection within the Asian household.

Living areas that are connected and open to the kitchen are ideal for the typical Asian lifestyle, which centers on casual and connectedness...

Locate open-style built-ins or even strategically placing furniture to physically separate the living from the dining and cooking areas while allowing visual connectivity is ideal.



5. We like warmth, greenery and lots of natural light...

Speaking from a Southeast Asian point of view, lushness, green landscape, even water features are soothing in the house.

Skylights into a centrally located room provide natural light. We like having indoor plants within the house. A green room/ conservatory is ideal especially in the cold winters of temperate climates...

Locating the various rooms according to specific site orientation is also important if one is to design a new house from scratch...

6. Single level floor plan...

Some of my Asian friends have voiced the attractiveness of having single-floor for the ability to age in place.

A split-level arrangement provides a viable option for added privacy to the sleeping areas...

7. Kitchen is very much the heart of living. When we cook, we cook.

Stir fry, deep-fry, and steam. These are 3 main cooking methods of Asian cooking. Having said that, one does baking on occasion such during festive seasons. One Asian friend has suggested a "wet" versus "dry" zone. The "wet" zone is where one would do the heavy-duty cooking ("wok-hei" so to speak...) which generates a lot of steam, grease and noise during the cooking process, ideally should have a powerful gas range cooker with strong fan exhausting to the outside.

A separate but visually connected area for breakfast/ weeknight dining and kids doing homework is also practical.

Round tables are preferred for Asian style dining. Apart from one's individual place setting, plates of food are usually placed in the center of the table as part of the sharing/ communal dining experience. For that reason, a lazy Susan on a circular table is ideal.

The eponymous rice cooker...if anything, the kitchen is not considered Asian without the rice cooker and it deserves its own special space in the kitchen...

8. We often have visitors on extended stays.

We regularly receive out of town guests. They can stay anywhere from a week to 6 months...! As hospitable hosts, naturally, one would want to make our guests as



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comfortable as we can while being able to continue with our daily routine and lifestyle minimally affected by stay-in guests and vice versa!

A library that can be converted into a guest room, with a Murphy bed. Depending on the layout, a separate bathroom is ideal. For layouts that lack space, bathrooms that allow for multiple users are ideal such that the vanity/ sink area can be used while someone else is using the shower/bath or toilet. A bar sink and mini-fridge is also useful for extended stay guests....

9. Or even live-in parents....

10. A few “feng-shui” items

No house can call itself Asian without considering a few “universal” Asian considerations. Call it superstition or feng-shui, they are but just a few practical considerations– here are but just a few:

- Staircases should not face the entrance.
- Kitchen area should not be directly by the front.
- Placement of bed should be such that the feet position is away from facing the front entrance.

Having said all of above, tune-in to Part II: the contemporary North American-Asian house – a prototype...coming soon....

If you have any thoughts of renovating, undecided or dissatisfied with certain parts of your house, that you would like to make better, please contact us, we would love to help!

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